RAJYA SABHA

Thursday, the 22nd November, 2007/1 Agrahayana, 1929 (Saka)

The House met at eleven of the clock,
MR. CHAIRMAN in the Chair.

ORAL ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS

*101. [The questioner (Shri Raj Nath Singh) was absent. For answer *vide* pages 18-19 *infra*.]

Conservation of Medicinal Plants and Traditional Knowledge

*102. SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA:††
SHRI HARISH RAWAT:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) the elements of the National Programme for Promoting Conservation of Medicinal Plants and Traditional Knowledge;

(b) the organizational structure set up to implement various objectives of the programme and hat manner the finances are being delegated to the participating States; and

) the number of States which have identified the sites for the conservation of medicinal the details of the medicinal plants, State-wise, and area-wise?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA): (a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) A project entitled "National Programme on Promoting Conservation of Medicinal Plants ‹ Traditional Knowledge for Enhancing Health and Livelihood Security" has been taken up in ‹e States, namely Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal, Rajasth..n, Manarashtra and Madhya Pradesh, with financial support from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The project started in May, 2006 with UNDP contribution of US $ 3 million (approx. Rs. 12 crores), to be completed in four and half years. The main elements of the project include: establishment of a system for rapid threat assessment and trade regulation; a network of Medicinal Plant Conservation Areas (MPCAs), State level medicinal ‹lant seed centre; method for sustainable harvest and augmentation; home herbal garden; ‹mmunity knowledge registers and mainstreaming traditional medicine into official primary ‹alth programme.

The question was actually asked on the floor of the House by Shri Santosh Bagrodia.

(b) The Union Ministry of Environment and Forests is the National Executing Agency for the programme and the Foundation for Revitalization of Local Health Tradition (FRLHT), Bangalore is the technical coordinating agency. The Forest Departments of the concerned States are the designated nodal agencies for implementation. The funds are released by the Ministry of Environment and Forests to the FRLHT for further release to the implementing agencies. The funds so disbursed are reimbursed by UNDP to the Government.

(c) Under the project only four States *viz.* Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, West Bengal and Rajasthan were required to identify sites for conservation. Of these, three States namely Madhya Pradesh, Orissa and Rajasthan have identified sites for conservation upto October, 2007. Teams of Taxonomists have been constituted for inventorisation of medicinal plants.

SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Sir, medicinal plants are very important not only for our country but for humanity, as a whole, because the kind medicines that are produced from them are good even for life threatening diseases. Some very important medicines which are made out of them are very important. For example, cyclosphorine is used in every transplant case. What I am trying to say is that we must try to save them. We must identify them and save them. But the management of these particular plants in the Government is handled by many Ministries. I would like to know which are the different Ministries who are handling this job because what is happening is that these plants are exported to China at a very low rate and, then, in China they are re-exporting these at a much higher rate.

MR. CHAIRMAN: What is the question?

SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: What is the Government planning so that this situation can be reversed? In fact, we should be able to process our plants in our own country.

SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA: Sir, in the Ministry of Environment and Forests we are doing the conservation of the medicinal plants. The hon. Member wants to know how many Departments or Ministries are doing the job for medicinal plants. Sir, I would like to inform the hon. Member, through you, that in Government of India there is a National Medicinal Plant Board under the Department of AYUSH in the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare. That is the nodal agency for the conservation, development, processing and marketing of the medicinal plants. So far as research work is concerned, the Ministry of Science and Technology is involved in the research and promotion. The DBT, DHT and CSIR are doing this job. In the Ministry of Agriculture there are institutions like ICAR, National Horticulture Mission, National Board for Horticulture, etc. which are doing cultivation and breeding aspects of the medicinal plants. The Ministry of Commerce is involved in the marketing and export of the medicinal plants whereas my Ministry, the Ministry of Environment and Forests, is doing conservation and protection and also some promotional job through some special projects. So far as the question that some plants are being exported to China and other countries is concerned, Sir, I would like to inform the hon. Member that there is an Act known as Biological Diversity Act, 2002 and under that if any flora or fauna is to be sent outside, permission will have to be obtained from the authority concerned.

SHRI SANTOSH BAGRODIA: Sir, my second supplementary is that the Ministry has identified under the project only four States to identify sites for conservation. Rajasthan is one of them. They have already identified. I would like to know from the hon. Minister what kind of financial assistance is offered to the State for the development of plant and also what is happening to the home herbal garden schemes amongst various citizen towns because these plants do not require large spaces and this is like dadi's medicine, Sir, if these plants can be developed at home, then, a lot of medical problems can be solved at home only.

SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA: Sir, we are running a programme that is called National Programme on Promoting Conservation of Medicinal Plants in traditional knowledge for enhancing health and livelihood security. This is a UNDP funded programme and my Ministry is the facilitator and the implementing agency is FRLHT. It is a centre of excellence in medicinal plants. So far as Rajasthan is concerned, it is covered under this programme and necessary funding is made through this implementing agency. Regarding herbal gardens, this is one of the components. Under this and through this scheme, funding is being made to the persons who desire to have a herbal garden.

श्री हरीश रावत: सर, मेरे प्रश्न के दो भाग हैं, पहला संरक्षण से संबंधित है, क्योंकि जो मध्य हिमालयन क्षेत्र है, वह अपनी जैविक विविधता के लिए जाना जाता है, जिसमें उत्तराखंड, हिमाचल और दूसरे भाग आते हैं। वहां पाई जाने वाली कई जड़ी-बूटियां इसमें विलुप्त होने की स्थिति में हैं या विलुप्त हो चुकी हैं या उसकी आशंका व्यक्त की जा रही है। तो मैं मंत्री जी से यह जानना चाहता हूं कि ऐसी कौन-कौन सी प्रजातियां हैं, जो विलुप्त होने के कगार पर हैं और उनको संरक्षण देने के लिए, उनके संवर्द्धन के लिए आप क्या योजना बना रहे हैं? मेरे प्रश्न का दूसरा भाग यह है कि कई लोगों ने Herbs की खेती को अपनाया है, लेकिन उसमें जो सबसिडी का कंपोनेंट है और मार्केटिंग फैसिलिटी है, वह इतनी कमजोर है कि जिन लोगों ने शुरूआत में उसको अपनाया था, वे उसको छोड़ने जा रहे हैं, तो सबसिडी का जो कंपोनेंट है, जो राजकीय सहायता का कंपोनेंट है, उसको बढ़ाने और उसकी मार्केटिंग फैसिलिटी को डेवलप करने के लिए आप क्या योजना बना रहे हैं, ताकि हम चीन का इस क्षेत्र में मुकाबला कर सकें?

श्री नमो नारायण मीणा: सर, माननीय सदस्य ने पहला सवाल विलुप्त होते हुए मैडिसिनल प्लांट्स के बारे में पूछा है। 1997 में एक सर्वे करवाया गया था जिसके अनुसार दो सौ मैडिसिनल प्लांट्स species नार्थ इंडिया में और नार्थ ईस्ट में हैं, जिनके over exploitation या विलुप्त होने की बात सामने आई थी, तो उनको rare endangered and threatened species डिक्लेयर किया गया है और 29 ऐसे प्लांट्स हैं, जो rare endangered हैं, विलुप्त होने के कगार पर हैं, उनका किसी भी प्रकार का एक्सपोर्ट डी॰जी॰एफ॰टी॰ द्वारा बैन किया हुआ है। जहां तक उत्तराखंड और अन्य हिमालयन प्रदेशों की बात आपने की है, अभी नौ स्टेट्स में हमारा यह प्रोग्राम चल रहा है, आगे एक प्रोजेक्ट और हमारे पास विचाराधीन है Conservation of Medicinal Plants. इसमें अरुणाचल प्रदेश, उत्तराखंड और छत्तीसगढ़ को हम जोड़ना चाहते हैं। UNDP ने उसको approve कर दिया है और Global Environment Facility (GEF) के approval के लिए हमने भेजा है। आशा है हमारी ये स्कीम्स मंजूर हो जाएंगी, तो फिर इनमें कंज़र्वेशन का काम हो सकेगा।

SHRI B.J. PANDA: Sir, the hon. Minister has mentioned that among the four States that have identified the sites, Orissa, which is my State, is also one of them. I would like to point out that Orissa is home to the Gandhamardan Mountain, which, according to the Ramayan, Hanumanji transported, lock, stock and barrel, because he could not identify a particular plant that was necessary.

My point is this. The Government has sanctioned Rs. 12 crores with the help of the UNDP is a very meagre sum. If it is to be divided amongst these four States, which have been asked to set up sites, it will be barely enough to run a nursery. I know this because I have contributed from my MPLADS funds to State-level efforts for conservation of medicinal plants, because these plants need a much greater diversity. They cannot be maintained in a small nursery. They need much larger tracks of land. So, this sum is inadequate. My question is: Is the Hon. Minister willing to consider enhancing this amount so that real justice can be done to this conservation effort?

SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA: Sir, hon. Member has asked regarding the availability of funds. The project—National Progamme on Promoting, Conservation of Medicinal Plants and Traditional Knowledge for Enhancing Health and Livelihood—is funded by the UNDP. As far

as availability of funds is concerned, I wish to submit that the Ministry of Environment and Forests has a major scheme—National Afforestation Programme—being run in the country. Sir, crores and crores of rupees are available for all the States. There are 811 forest divisions in the country and we are funding all the forest divisions. We have also advised the State Governments to set apart 10 per cent of the debilitating forest area to grow medicinal plants and bamboos. This is one thing.

Secondly, the nodal Ministry—I have told this in my earlier reply also—is AYUSH. There is also a Medicinal Board. It is also giving funds to various States. This year, its fund is Rs. 80 crores for the entire country. There are other schemes like Rozgar Guarantee Scheme under the Ministry of Rural Development in which horticulture plants are given free to SC/ST and BPL families. The Department of Horticulture in the Ministry of Agriculture is also giving funds to various project components and medicinal plants are also included in them. Therefore, there is no dearth of money under various schemes of the Government for planting medicinal plants in the country.

SHRI SHARAD ANANTRAO JOSHI: Sir, through you, I would like to ask the hon. Minister whether any study has been made, or, if the Government has come to any conclusion on the subject whether the medicinal plants grown in artificially driven plantations suffer in medicinal qualities when compared with the medicinal plants found in natural circumstances.

SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA: Sir, I appreciate the concern of the hon. Member. This is a modern technology in the field of biotechnology. As far as my Ministry is concerned, we are doing conservation and protection. The nodal Ministry or the nodal authority in the country is the National Medicinal Plants Board. It is taking up plantation, promotion and development of medicinal plants. I may say that this is a subject which comes under that department.

DR. (SHRIMATI) NAJMA A. HEPTULLA: Sir, the hon. Minister himself has admitted and other Members have also said that a lot of medicinal and other precious plants, which are very rich are needed and useful for us in our country, especially in the Terai area of Himalayas, are on the verge of extinction or some of them have already become extinct. Whatever measures we are taking, but, Mr. Minister, are you aware that many international organizations/institutions have stolen the germ plasms of these plants? They have registered them under the Intellectual Property Rights. In the light of the globalisation and trade practices they are adopting, I would like to know what the Government of India is going to do if they patent these germ plasms and they grow it. Even the wild variety of rice is being patented by some companies in America. What are we going to do about these matters?

SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA: Sir, so far as the first part of the question is concerned, I do agree that, to some extent, there is a danger of extinction of some of the rare species of the medicinal plants. And, as I have ealier said, that 200 medicinal species of plants in the Southern and the Northern India are classified as rare, endangered and threatened. Yes, we are very rich in medicinal plants. There are about 7,500 species of medicinal plants available in the country. But only around 2,000 species have been documented. And, they are being used. After the Biological Diversity Act, 2002, no plants without the prior approval of the authority can be exported outside. This is the legal position after this Act. They were earlier exported...(*Interruptions*)...

DR. (SHRIMATI) NAJMA A. HEPTULLA: No. Sir, they were not exported; they were stolen. ...(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA: Exported or stolen, I fully agree with you. They were stolen or exported...(*Interruptions*)...

MR. CHAIRMAN: Please let the hon. Minister continue with the answer. ...(*Interruptions*)...

SHRI NAMO NARAIN MEENA: Okay, whatever the case be. The subject matter is not related to my Ministry. I appreciate and agree with you. I will convey your concern to the relevant Ministry. ...(*Interruptions*)...

Shortcomings in TRAI Act

*103. SHRI RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR: Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) Act which came into being in 1997 and in which many amendments have already been made, still has many shortcomings for which further amendments are required;

(b) if so, whether the shortcomings have been indentified by Government;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) by when, necessary amendments are proposed to be made in the said Act?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI A. RAJA): (a) to (d) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) to (c) TRAI Act, 1997 was amended once in January, 2000 by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Amendment) Act, 2000. Subsequently a proposal has been received from TRAI for certain amendments to TRAI Act, 1997, to address various issues relating mainly to more operational freedom to TRAI and administration of broadcasting services.

(d) The amendments proposed by TRAI in the TRAI Act, 1997 requires inter-ministerial consultation before finalization of Government's views in this regard. No definite time-frame can, therefore, be given for carrying out the proposed amendment or otherwise.

SHRI RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR: Sir, one of the promises made by the UPA Government, when it took office in 2004, was that it would review and strengthen the independent regulatory institutions, including telecom. The reason for this was obvious. It is clear that some of the regulatory institutions, more specifically, the one in telecom sector, have clearly not lived up to expectations in both, independence and quality. Unfortunately, very little has been done in this regard. Therefore, I would respectfully submit to the hon. Minister and push him for some specific answers. So, my first supplementary is that section 11 of the TRAI Act provides for an accord— "The authority shall ensure transparency while exercising its powers in discharging its functions". I would submit that there is very little clarity on it really means *vis-a-vis* the responsibility of the TRAI. So, would the hon. Minister think it appropriate that the Act be amended to provide clarity on this section and to provide a stronger and more vigorous oversight of the Parliament on the TRAI.

SHRI A. RAJA: Sir, it is needless to submit before the House that TRAI is a Body which is constituted under a statute. Section 11 provides how the recommendations of the TRAI can be accepted and admitted by the Government as soon as it received the recommendations. So far as the recommendations made by the TRAI are concerned, most of the recommendations were accepted by the Government. In case any deviation between the Ministry and the TRAI Regulator is there, the matter can be remitted to the TRAI by virtue of section 11. Such a case does not arise. If it arises, then, it will be remitted back to the TRAI. So, I do not think that, as such, section 11 needs any further amendment.

SHRI RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR: Sir, I would respectfully disagree with the Minister, but I hope that this can be further discussed. But, let me put a second supplementary which